

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 05052

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PINS, PINT, SY
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN SYRIA

REF: STATE 214097 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: I CONCUR THAT A GENERAL DEMARCHE ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES IN SYRIA IS CALLED FOR AND COULD BE BENEFICIAL IF DELIVERED ON AN APPROPRIATE OCCASION. IF POLITICAL CLIMATE IS RIGHT, WE MIGHT DISCUSS THE ISSUE IN CONNECTION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS DAY IN DECEMBER. IN THE MEANTIME WE WILL CONTINUE INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. WE WOULD BE PLEASED TO REVIEW THE DEPARTMENT'S IDEAS ON POINTS WE MIGHT MAKE TO THE SYRIANS AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME. END SUMMARY.

2. I CONCUR THAT A GENERAL DEMARCHE AND MORE COMPREHENSIVE DISCUSSION OF THE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THUS FAR, WE HAVE CONCENTRATED ESSENTIALLY ON THE QUESTION OF SYRIAN JEWRY WITH EXCELLENT RESULTS. WHILE THIS SHOULD REMAIN OUR
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FIRST PRIORITY, THE TIME MAY SOON BE OPPORTUNE TO ENGAGE IN A WIDER RANGING DISCUSSION WITH THE SYRIANS. WE AGREE WITH THE DEPARTMENT THAT IN ANY CASE IT WOULD NOT BE APPROPRIATE TO RAISE THE QUESTION WITH THE SYRIANS UNTIL THE SUBJECT OF FY-79 ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN DEALT WITH FAVORABLY BY CONGRESS.

3. RECENTLY WE HAVE ADDRESSED FOUR SPECIFIC CASES INVOLVING APPARENT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WITH THE MFA: 1) THE CASE OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, MICHAEL NADDAF, ARRESTED ON NARCOTICS CHARGES WHO ALLEGED PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT BY THE ARRESTING AUTHORITIES; 2) THE CASE OF DR. HANNA MIKHAIL, A PALESTINIAN PLO MEMBER WHO DISAPPEARED TWO YEARS AGO; 3) THE CASE OF AKL QURBAN, A SYMPATHIZER OF THE IRAQI BAAATH PARTY DETAINED SINCE 1970 WHOSE HEALTH HAS REPORTEDLY SUFFERED BADLY WHILE IN JAIL; AND 4) CAMILLE COPTY, A RELATIVE OF ONE OF EMBASSY BEIRUT'S LOCAL EMPLOYEES WHO DISAPPEARED RECENTLY. WHILE WE MAY NOT GET EFFECTIVE ACTION ON THESE CASES, THE FACT THAT THE MFA IS ACCEPTING OUR DEMARCHES ON INDIVIDUAL CASES IS A NEW AND POSITIVE DEPARTURE.

4. IN ADDITION, WE ARE COMMENCING TO USE THE MECHANISM OF CULTURAL EXCHANGES TO PROMOTE OUR HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, WE ARE SEEKING A SYRIAN PARTICIPANT FOR THE USICA MULTI-REGIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS PROGRAM BEING PREPARED FOR NOVEMBER. UNFORTUNATELY, THE SHORT LEAD TIME PROBABLY WILL PRECLUDE SYRIAN PARTICIPATION, BUT WE WOULD HOPE A SPECIAL PROGRAM COULD BE DESIGNED ALONG THE SAME LINES FOR A MINIMUM OF TWO SYRIAN PARTICIPANTS NEXT SPRING.

5. IN THIS CONNECTION, WE WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT NO RESPONSE WAS MADE TO A LETTER TRANSMITTED IN MAY (DAMASCUS 2858) FROM THE LEAGUE FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN
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SYRIA. ALTHOUGH THIS ORGANIZATION'S LETTER WAS POLEMICAL, ITS ACTIVITIES HERE ARE NOT. WE SHOULD TRY TO ENCOURAGE SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AND ENHANCE THEIR STATURE WITH THE AUTHORITIES BY DEMONSTRATING THAT WE TAKE THEIR APPROACHES SERIOUSLY. WE ARE SEEKING TO ENLARGE OUR CONTACTS WITH THIS GROUP.

6. ALL OF THE ABOVE ARE INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVES WHICH WE WILL CONTINUE, BUT AT AN APPROPRIATE MOMENT I WOULD PLAN TO INITIATE A COMPREHENSIVE DISCUSSION ON THE SUBJECT WITH SYRIAN AUTHORITIES. PROVIDING THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IS RIGHT, A GOOD TIME TO DO THIS MIGHT BE IN CONNECTION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, WHICH LAST YEAR OCCURRED ON DECEMBER 10. THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT ISSUED A POSITIVE STATEMENT ON THAT OCCASION LAST YEAR AND WOULD PROBABLY NOT CONSIDER IT OUT OF ORDER IF WE WERE TO RAISE THE ISSUE WITH THEM THIS YEAR AT THAT TIME.

7. AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME, WE WOULD BE HAPPY TO RECEIVE DEPARTMENT'S TALKING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION. WE MIGHT WISH TO ADD TO THEM OR MODIFY THEM IN LIGHT OF THE PARTICULAR SITUATION HERE. SEELYE

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